A

LETTER

TO HIS EXCELLENCY

COUNT * * *,

ON

POETRY, PAINTING,

AND

SCULPTURE.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR T. BECKET AND
P. A. DE HONDT, IN THE STRAND.
MDCCLXVIII.

A

LETTER,

SIR,

WHEN I had the honour of conversing with your Excellency upon the subject of poetry and painting, I promised you I would commit my thoughts, such as they are, to paper, for the sake of ranging them in better

order; that the force of thoſe arguments, by which I endeavoured to ſupport my opinion, might appear with the greater perſpicuity, which is the occaſion of my addreſſing this letter to your Excellency.

The imitative arts, for diſtinction ſake, are called poetry, painting and ſculpture, though in fact the painter and ſculptor are, and muſt be, poets, according to the general acceptation of the word, which ſignifies a creator or inventor, otherwiſe the one is only a dawber of colours, and the other is nothing more than a ſtone-cutter. Yet if we examine this point with a ſtricter atten-

attention, we ſhall find that the moſt plaſtic genius is but a copieſt, and that nature itſelf is the great archetype, to which the poet only *holds up the mirror*, in order to catch the reflection.

The ſubject matter, then, of all poetical imitation, may be divided into external and internal objects: by *external* is meant, the whole material world, that inexhauſtible variety of images with which the viſible creation is ſtored; by *internal* is meant, the operations of the mind, which include not only the paſſions, ſentiments and manners, but alſo all the various combinations of thoſe images, which are

the workings of the imagination or fancy; that faculty which ſelects the beauties of this grand original, and diſpoſes them into agreeable pictures: and this is what is underſtood, by the term *invention*, when applied to any of the three kinds of poetry.

From this view of the *ſubject* of the mimetic arts in general, we may conſider the *manner* in which each repreſents its object; and from thence be led to aſcertain their juſt *bounds*, or to know what is preciſely the object of each particular genus of imitation: and from thus inveſtigating their principles, I think it will be ſhewn, " That " alle-

" allegorical perſonages ought never " to be admitted into the higher " claſſes of painting or ſculpture;" a propoſition which may at firſt ſight, perhaps, appear ſtrange, but I doubt not will be found, upon reflection, to be true.

It is evident, that painting and ſculpture have, for their mode of repreſentation, ſigns, which are the exact reſemblance of the object they would create in the mind; and that therefore they ſpeak the language of every nation on the earth; for viſion among all mankind depends upon the ſame principles of optics. But with

the poet it is far otherwiſe; the means by which he excites in the minds of others thoſe ideas which exiſt in his own mind, is by an artifical combination of ſigns the moſt arbitrary that can poſſibly be; which have not in themſelves the leaſt connection with their object, nor can ever be able to excite it in other men but by general conſent: hence it is manifeſt, that his pictures muſt be confined to the ſmall number of thoſe, who, if I may ſo ſpeak, are entered into covenant with him; nay, even to thoſe who do underſtand his language in general, ſome of the niceſt touches of his art may be loſt, for want of a thorough intimacy

with

with his particular dialect, in order to have preciſely the ſame idea annexed to each word that he has.

This defect of language is ſo notorious, that the poetry of the pen would be utterly impracticable, if it were not remedied by other advantages which it enjoys in a higher degree than it's ſiſter arts. Theſe advantages are various, but I ſhall enlarge on one or two only which will beſt ſerve to elucidate the point I am now concerned with.

Words, even the moſt ſignificant, can only give the general image of the

object they would repreſent, whereas painting and ſculpture deſcribe the moſt minute ſpecialities; but then, on the other hand, words, though they expreſs reſemblance with leſs preciſion, expreſs it with greater facility; by which I do not mean that they are more eaſily formed, or changed, or effaced; but that there are certain combinations of ideas, which ſtart at once at the magic ſtroke of the poet's pen. The poet only gives, as it were, the hint, which the reader immediately ſeizes, and forms the picture by the creative powers of his own fancy. I think this may be illuſtrated, if it needs illuſtration, by thoſe ſlight ſketches which we

ſome-

ſometimes ſee in caricatures, where the painter ſhall be able to excite the idea of a perſon he would repreſent by one ſingle happy line, which marks only one diſtinguiſhing feature in that perſon's countenance.

Beſides this, the poet has the advantage of uſing negative ſigns, which upon examination will be found to be the chief, I had almoſt ſaid, the only ſource of the ſublime in all poetic compoſition; for ſo extenſive is the capacity of the mind, that it cannot be filled with any thing finite and determined: and thus even obſcurity itſelf can ſometimes conſtitute the higheſt beauties of poetry. Surely,

Surely, thoſe ſublime deſcriptions of ſin and death in Milton, derive from theſe cauſes their influence over the human mind.

The one ſeem'd woman to the waiſt, and fair,
But ended foul in many a ſcaly fold
Voluminous and vaſt, a ſerpent arm'd
With mortal ſting: about her middle round
A cry of hell-hounds, never ceaſing bark'd
With wide Cerberian mouths full loud, and rung
A hideous peal; yet when they liſt would creep,
If aught diſturb'd their noiſe, into her womb,
And kennel there; yet there ſtill bark'd and howl'd
Within unſeen.——

—The

——— The other ſhape,
If ſhape it might be call'd, that ſhape had none
Diſtinguiſhable in member, joint or limb;
Or ſubſtance might be call'd that ſhadow ſeem'd,
For each ſeem'd either; black it ſtood as night,
Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell,
And ſhook a deadly dart; what ſeem'd his head
The likeneſs of a kingly crown had on.

This laſt imagery is entirely negative and obſcure, and yet the mind forms to itſelf an idea as abſolute and clear, as that of the Farneſe Hercules, or of the Cleopatra of Guido.

The next advantage I ſhall mention is this, that one of the principal means by

by which poetry compenſates for the barrenneſs of language itſelf, is by ſubſtituting reſemblances inſtead of proper terms: and theſe reſemblances it borrows not only from all the ſtores of nature, of ſcience and of art, but even from ſuperſtition and the wayward fancies of its own creation. Uncircumſcribed by place or time, poetry unites the moſt diſtant periods, expatiates into inviſible regions, and culls the flowers that bloom no where but in the fields of the imagination, to adorn its ſubject.

Such metaphorical expreſſions, when continued, are wrought up into the moſt

moſt beautiful fictions, which appear like the dreams or reveries of a madman.

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to ſhape, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

SHAKESPEAR.

From this origin aroſe all the inhabitants of the poetic world, the gods and goddeſſes of Homer; the ſpectres, fairies and witches of Shakeſpear; the fawns,

fawns, the ſatyrs, the dryads of the woods, and the tritons and naïds that frequent the waters; in one word, the whole family of allegories. Thus the poets make a virtue of neceſſity, and are indebted to the poverty of language for thoſe very ornaments with which they have ſo abundantly enriched their ſtile. Theſe fictions, when ſtrongly conceived, and happily executed, have made ſuch lively impreſſions on all poetic ſpirits, the images thus pictured have appeared ſo ſtriking and lovely, that the painter and ſculptor have been ſeduced by their attractive charms, and been tempted to decoy them from their lawful maſters. But what has

been the conſequence? The inſtant theſe deities are repreſented under any viſible form, they loſe all their divinity; ſuch practice is a kind of idolatry (if the expreſſion may be allowed) in the religion of poetry, which deſtroys the admiration due to the gods of ancient mythology.

Now, Sir, I know, you'll ſay, and back your aſſertion with the authority of Horace, that this licence hath ever been allowed to painting as well as poetry.

——— Pictoribus atque poetis
Quidlibet audendi ſemper fuit *æqua* poteſtas.

What

What, you will ſay, muſt we condemn the Pygmalion of Falconet, you have ſo often ſpoken of in raptures, as one of the hardieſt enterprizes of ſculpture? Muſt we deny him his little Cupid, which deſcends, and kiſſing the hand of the figure, awakens it immediately to live and love? This caſe, Sir, is fairly an exception; the ſculptor is not admitted the aid of colours to diſtinguiſh the fleſh from the marble; Falconet has here wrought a miracle,

Et deus interſit *quia* dignus vindice nodus.

If we examine the works of the greateſt painters, we ſhall find their practice

practice will ſerve to confirm the truth of my propoſition, we ſhall ſee that they have very rarely admitted theſe imaginary beings into their pictures, and when they have admitted them they have ſtill more rarely ſucceeded. I muſt here beg leave to cite a paſſage very much in point from an author, who has treated this ſubject with the acuteneſs and ſenſibility of a real critic.

"Thoſe painters who are now eſteemed "the greateſt poets in their art, are "not ſuch as have brought forth the "greateſt number of theſe allegorical "perſonages. It is true, Raphael

" has introduced ſome of that kind,
" but that painter knew his buſineſs
" too well to employ them otherwiſe
" than as ornaments, which ſerve as
" the border or ſupport of his pictures;
" nay, he has even taken the pre-
" caution to write the names of theſe
" allegorical perſons under every
" figure: and although Raphael was
" very capable of making them un-
" derſtood by their proper characteriſ-
" tics; yet no one finds that precau-
" tion uſeleſs, and it is even to be
" wiſhed he had carried it a little far-
" ther, and given us an explanation of
" the ſymbols with which he has dreſ-
" ſed them: for notwithſtanding the
" inſcrip-

" inſcription informs us of the name,
" it is not yet very eaſy to gueſs the
" meaning and force of all the emble-
" matic attributes with which they
" are attended.

" Let us return to the ancient alle-
" gorical perſonages, and ſee what uſe
" is permitted to be made of them in
" hiſtorical compoſitions. The opinion
" of the moſt able judges is, that they
" ought to be admitted, but with the
" greateſt reſerve; ſince theſe pieces
" are intended to repreſent ſome event
" which has actually happened, and
" which is believed to have happened
" in the manner there repreſented.

" Even where they may be admitted,
" they ought to be introduced only as
" coats of arms, or attributes of the
" principal figures, which are the
" hiſtorical perſons. 'Tis thus Har-
" pocrates, the god of ſilence, or Mi-
" nerva, may be placed by the ſide of
" a prince to ſignify his prudence and
" diſcretion. I can never think, that
" allegorical perſons ought themſelves
" to be the principal actors: perſons,
" which we know to be phantoms of
" the imagination, created at pleaſure,
" which we cannot ſuppoſe to be en-
" dued with paſſions and feelings like
" our own, can never be able to
" in-

" intereſt us in what concerns them."*

I believe you will ſoon agree with me, Sir, that this ſagacious obſerver, had he not been over-awed by the authority of Guido, Dominichino, Rubens, Le Sueur, and other immortal names, who have done ſuch honour to their art, would have proceeded further in his cenſures, and entirely condemned the practice. But what if Guido, if Dominichino, if Rubens and Le Sueur have been guilty of the miſtake; can any authority juſtify error? Enchanted by the charms of their pencil, the ſpectator may feel himſelf tranſported, as it were, into a fairy land;

* Du Bos *Reflexions ſur la poëſie & la peinture.*

but the inſtant he recovers his reaſon, the ſpell will ceaſe. Who does not wiſh that ſin and death had been proper actors in Milton's divine poem? But what true critic can allow them to be proper actors, when introduced againſt all the rules of probability? Shakeſpear has given to his imaginary beings ſuch attributes and ſuch language, that they will always be admired; but, be aſſured, it is only the execution of the poet which raiſes our admiration. I might find ſimilar inſtances alſo, in the works of Ariſtophanes, Plautus, and many more of ancient, as well as others of modern date, but theſe phantoms have long ſince been driven from the ſtage: it is high

high time that good ſenſe and true taſte ſhould baniſh them from the ſcenes of ſtatuary and painting; and ſend them into eternal oblivion with the giants and monſters of romance, unleſs, unhappily for the arts, they ſhould be recalled from exile, in ſome future reign of ignorance and ſuperſtition.

Hiſtory painting is of the nature of dramatic poetry, it profeſſes to copy real life, and will therefore be always of the higheſt value when it repreſents humanity moſt juſtly; when it repreſents men as they exiſt in the world, not as they are diſguiſed in the imagination of the poet: for all theſe fan-

taſtic beings, are only human characters diverſified by unnatural attributes and artificial manners. One ſingle ſtroke copied after nature will affect the ſoul, and extort an applauſe from its feelings, which all the vain flouriſhes of art can never reach. The paſſions, the inward workings of the mind, are made objective to the ſenſe of ſight, by action, attitude, and the expreſſion of the countenance: theſe ſpeak as emphatically to the eye, as the moſt powerful rhetorick to the ear; and the painter or ſculptor, who has not the talent to interpret their language, wants that genius which conſtitutes the poet. Whatever is not within the reach

reach of his juſt expreſſion, depend upon it, is not a ſubject for his art.

I think we might appeal to the Luxemburgh gallery, for a final deciſion of this point; where it is allowed by every one, that all the colouring and graces of Rubens's pencil, all the charms of his execution, have not been able to ſupport the error of his plan. How many various reaſons have the virtuoſi aſſigned, to account for the diſguſt which is created by thoſe beautiful extravagancies? Whereas, in truth, it is not probability alone, that is violated by that incongruous mixture of fabulous with real hiſtory; but our underſtand-

derſtanding revolts againſt the cheat, when that is made the object of ſenſe, which has no exiſtence but in the imagination. One ſource of the pleaſure we receive in viewing a juſt picture or ſtatue, ariſes from the compariſon the mind makes between the repreſentation and the original; and marking how exactly, I had almoſt ſaid, how naturally art imitates nature: but where is the archetype to which theſe non-exiſtencies are to be referred? will they ſay, in the works of the poets? I am afraid their ſkill will appear to no advantage by ſuch a compariſon.

When

When ſpeaking of the moſt common ſubjects, as the earth, a mountain, a river, a country; or even of abſtract ideas, time, truth, &c. the poet, by his proſopopæia, can change them into perſons; and ſay, in his language, the earth rejoices, the mountains clap their hands, the river pours his ſtreams from his fruitful urn, or a country receives her ſovereign with open arms: but will the figure of the Tiber, leaning on his urn, ever excite in the ſpectator the idea of a river? Or does the female, with a crown on her head, a ſcepter in her hand, and a blue mantle ſtrewed with fleurs-de-lys of gold, ever raiſe in his mind the idea of a king-

a kingdom? The one will ever be a half-drowned old man, and the other nothing more than the queen of France: and it requires much learned labour to pervert the mind from its natural judgment, before it can be ſtrained to ſo high a pitch of credulity, as to believe, for a moment, ſuch idle impoſtures. In ſhort, allegories and emblems, in theſe arts, which owe all their little merit to the pertneſs of the conceit, are at beſt but epigrams, ever to be ranked in the loweſt ſpecies of wit; and conſequently, unworthy to be admitted into the nobler compoſitions: moſt frequently they are myſterious riddles, which would require an Œdi-

pus

pus to ſolve them; and ſcarcely are they worth the trouble of the diſcovery when their meaning is found.

Should the painter or ſculptor here aſk me, by what means I would repreſent theſe ſubjects, if I am denied the uſe of allegory and emblem? I ſhould anſwer, that his queſtion might puzzle me, but not convince me that he ought to uſe them. I would aſk, in my turn, how will he repreſent the Jupiter of Homer, or the Venus of Virgil?

Η, και κυανεῃσιν επ' ὀφρυσι νευσε Κρονιων,
Αμβροσιαι δ' ἀρα χαιται επερρωσαντο ἀνακτος
Κρατος

Κρατος απ' αθανατοιο· μεγαν δ' ελελιξεν
Ολυμπον.

He ſpoke, and awful bends his ſable brows,
Shakes his ambroſial curls, and gives the nod,
The ſtamp of fate, and ſanction of the God:
High heav'n with trembling the dread ſignal took,
And all Olympus to the center ſhook.

POPE.

How will he deſcribe his nod, which even makes the whole expanſe of heaven vibrate? for poetry can alone give motion to its pictures. With what tinges will he paint his ambroſial locks, or with what colours repreſent his

his immortality, which is an idea entirely negative? Can the Jupiter of Phidias, or the Jupiter of Rubens mounted upon an eagle, with a little bundle of ſomething called thunderbolts in his talons, be compared with the αθανατος αναξ, the immortal king of Homer? Or can the Venus of Medicis, that abſolute maſter-piece of the chiſel, equal in divinity the Venus of the Æneid, whoſe ambroſial curls breathe forth celeſtial perfumes, and whoſe gait ſhews her a goddeſs?

—— Avertens roſeâ cervice refulſit:
Ambroſiæque comæ divinum vertice odorem
Spiravêre: pedes veſtis defluxit ad imos:
Et vera inceſſu patuit Dea.

Can

Can any thing be more pictoreſque than theſe lines in the odes of Horace?

Pallida mors æquo pulſat pede pauperum tabernas
Regumque turres.

——— Timor & minæ
Scandunt eodem quo dominus: neque
Decedit æratâ triremi, et
Poſt equitem ſedet atra cura.

Yet how will they repreſent them on the marble, or on the canvas? How will they exhibit death in the action deſcribed by the poet? or under what form will they ſhew fear and remorſe purſuing the guilty wherever he flies,

or care mounting behind him when he beſtrides his horſe? I might collect a thouſand other inſtances from all the poets: for ſcarcely is there one tranſformation, in Ovid's whole metamorphoſes, that ever made a proper ſubject for a picture. The ſtory of Acis and Galathea is well known, and that the goddeſs changed him into a river; look at the picture of this ſubject by Luca Jordano, where you ſee the figure of a man with water iſſuing from the crown of his head, from his mouth, and from his breaſts; and there wanted only to make it iſſue from one part more natural to complete the ridicule. This change, like the reſt, is ſufficient-

ly improbable even in the poet, it is utterly impoſſible in the picture, where there is not, where there cannot be a goddeſs to effect it. If I aſk, in my turn, I ſay, how will the painter or ſculptor repreſent theſe ſubjects, what anſwer will he give? will he reply they are not proper for his art? I agree with him; no ſubject can be proper for his art, which he is not capable of exhibiting without an abſurdity.

From hence, I apprehend, this important maxim may be drawn as a corollary, "That the greateſt perfec-
"tion of painting and ſculpture is con-
"ſiſtent with ſimplicity of deſign."

I ſhall

I ſhall endeavour to explain this: every one knows, who has beſtowed the leaſt reflection upon this matter, that the painter and ſtatuary can have but one moment of time, and that their ſpace is almoſt as much circumſcribed: it is therefore impoſſible to have a ſucceſſion of ideas ſufficient to conſtitute wit in ſo ſhort an inſtant: but ſhort as this inſtant is, with what abundance of ideas may it be fraught under the hands of a creator like Pouſſin? He will exert his poetic prerogative to aſſemble every object that can, agreeably to reaſon and ſound philoſophy, enter into his compoſition: he will place theſe objects in all the diverſity

of ſituation, and expreſs their different ſentiments and intereſts by all the variety of action, attitude, and turns of the countenance. Look upon his death of Germanicus, and ſay if the true poet wants the adventitious aids of emblem and allegory to paint the pure feelings of nature: above all, behold the mother of Germanicus, whoſe face is covered with her handkerchief; that figure is truly ſublime; the negation, the obſcurity in it is more ſignificant than any poſitive expreſſion can poſſibly be: the imagination takes the hint, leaves the canvas behind, purſues every thought, every tender remembrance that can heighten the diſtreſs of

mater-

maternal ſorrow, till the ſpectator is loſt in the wanderings of his own reflections.

The ſculptor, who is at preſent employed in making an equeſtrian ſtatue of Peter the Great, gives us ſimply the figure of his heroe on horſe-back. Yet ſimple as this image is, the countenance, the air, the right-hand which is extended expreſs, in characters legible by every poetic eye, the thought and deep reflection of the founder of an empire: the aſtoniſhing rapidity with which he produced thoſe revolutions in the manners and cuſtoms of his people, is clearly ſignified by the gallop-

ing of his horſe : the difficulties he had to encounter in his enterprizes are moſt aptly deſigned by his aſcending a rifted rock, which ſerves as the pedeſtal of his piece : nay, he has even found the means to mark the period of his heroe's life, by ſhewing that he never reached the decline. If, inſtead of this poetry, which is ſo naturally in his ſubject, the ſculptor had deſcribed him driving the allegorical figures of barbariſm, ignorance, and ſuperſtition before him, I much doubt but this benefactor of his country had appeared like a tyrant, who in wantonneſs trampled his ſubjects under his horſes houghs. It is quite from my point here to ſpeak

of

of the execution of this work, and therefore I ſay nothing of the beauties of the drapery, which is ſo happily pictoreſque, or of the difficulty of repreſenting the courſer in the attitude I have juſt now mentioned. As yet the artiſt has only finiſhed his ſmall model, the large one is but juſt begun.

'Tis here the painter and ſculptor have the great advantage over the poet; they, and they only can diſtinguiſh, with minute exactneſs *, the age, the character, the ſex, the profeſſion,

* See *Reflexions ſur la poëſie & la peinture.*

and even the country of their perſonages, either by their dreſs, their complexion, their beard, their height, their ſhape; the figure of the head, the countenance, the fire, the turn and the colour of the eyes, and innumerable other circumſtances, which would make the moſt tireſome detail ſhould the poet attempt to deſcribe them. Nay, ſhould he attempt to deſcribe only the more general action and attitude, he would either diſguſt the reader or diſtract his attention; as may be ſeen in two dramatic pieces * of a celebrated author; if when the reader ſhould be,

* Le pere de famille, & le fils naturel.

as it were, entranced, and every faculty of the ſoul ſwallowed up in his anxiety and concern at ſome extraordinary turn of fortune in the plot, if at this juncture he be awakened to obſerve the turn of the heroe's eye, or the croſſing of his arms, he feels himſelf as peeviſh as a child diſturbed from a pleaſing dream. He who knows how to read has no need of ſuch remarks on the action, and they will never aſſiſt the perſon who is ignorant of elocution: elocution is in oratory what juſt execution is in muſic. As a moderate performer may be able to play every note with the moſt ſcrupulouſs exactneſs, without giving the ſentiment of the compoſer;

poſer; ſo the reader, who has not this talent, though he pronounces every word, will neither underſtand himſelf, nor give others to underſtand the ſpirit of the poet, or of the orator. This, Sir, I take to be one cauſe that theſe pieces have not ſucceeded in the cloſet, and I apprehend another to be that rigid adherence to the unities, which is at leaſt unneceſſary in all that ſtrictneſs, if not impracticable without loſing beauties vaſtly ſuperior: for the poet himſelf is obliged to ſpeak, and to run into declamation, inſtead of the characters of his drama ſupporting the converſation in a manner that ſhews the caſt of each individual. Yet let

me do the juſtice to this author's acknowledged merit to add, that miſtakes like theſe are glorious faults, which only men of genius and talents are capable of committing.

To return to our point: give me leave, Sir, to recal to your memory two pictures, very ſimilar in the deſign, and drawn by two great maſters in their different arts, which will ſerve to evince this propoſition ſtill more fully: I mean the Mezentius of Virgil, in the tenth book of the Æneid, and the Beliſarius of Vandyke; and we ſhall ſee, notwithſtanding the general ſimilarity, how greatly their modes of repreſentation

ſentation demanded theſe poets to differ in the execution, and how much the compariſon is in favour of the painter, with reſpect to the circumſtances juſt now mentioned.

Interea genitor, Tyberini ad fluminis undam,
Vulnera ficcabat lymphis, corpuſque lavabat,
Arboris acclinis trunco: procul ærea ramis
Dependet galea, & prato gravia arma quieſcunt.
Stant lecti circum juvenes: ipſe æger, anhelans,
Colla fovet, fuſus propexam in pectore barbam.
Multa ſuper Lauſo rogitat, multoſque remittit
Qui revocent, mæſtique ferant mandata parentis.

Mean-

Meantime his father, now no father, ſtood
And waſh'd his wounds by Tiber's yellow flood:
Oppreſt with anguiſh, panting and o'erſpent
His fainting limbs againſt an oak he lent.
A bough his brazen helmet did ſuſtain,
His heavier arms lay ſcattered on the plain;
A choſen train of youth around him ſtand;
His drooping head was reſted on his hand.
His griſly beard his penſive boſom ſought,
And all on Lauſus ran his reſtleſs thought.
Careful, concern'd his danger to prevent,
He much enquir'd, and many a meſſage ſent
To warn him from the field.———

DRYDEN.

This imagery, as fas as it is repreſented to the eye, if I may ſo ſay, is much

much inferior to the Beliſarius; Virgil ſcarcely touches the face even of the principal figure, and the train of youth who ſurround it have no diſtinction, in countenance, geſture, ſhape, age or dreſs. The diſpoſition of his armour, and the attitude of Mezentius, *arboris acclinis trunco*, are, indeed, finely pictoreſque, and the *anhelans*, panting, cannot be reached by the pencil: but that which conſtitutes the higheſt beauty of the piece is of a different kind; it is that affecting pathos in his anxiety and ſorrow for his ſon,

Multa ſuper Lauſo rogitat, multoſque remittit
Qui revocent, mæſtique ferant mandata parentis.

Hence

Hence it may appear that, according to our former diviſion, the internal objects, the workings of the ſoul are properly the ſubject of poetry; as words are the ſigns of language, language is the perfect image of the mind, which it can, therefore, repreſent in its moſt exact particularities. I do not ſay the poet cannot expreſs external objects at all, he may expreſs them; but not with the preciſion of the painter: he may draw a landſcape, if you pleaſe, and adorn it with woods and flowers, with waters, &c. but the circumſtances he dwells upon muſt be of a different kind from thoſe the painter deſcribes moſt happily. The poet may make his birds

birds ſing among his trees, which are waved by gentle zephyrs, or ſtun your ears with the falls of his caſcades; he can cool you with his ſhades, or ſcorch you with his ſun; but the plumage of his birds, the tints of his flowers, the froth of his waters, or the rays of his ſun, can be only generally touched.

On the contrary, the painter or ſculptor, can only repreſent the internal objects, the paſſions, ſentiments, &c. by what is objective to the eye alone; for how will the pencil or chiſel expreſs the various turns of the mind, the doubts, the hopes and the fears which naturally ſucceed one another? How will

will they deſcribe, for example, the heſitation of Dido, when leading Æneas round the walls of her city, ſhe is about to ſpeak to him, yet ſtops?

Incipit effari mediâque in voce reſiſtit.

Or even into what other language can that little ſtroke after nature be tranſlated? or how ſhall we ſay the word was half out of her mouth? Such minute ſpecialities are not ſubject to the powers of the painters, and if they have recourſe to allegory and emblem to expreſs theſe ideas, inſtead of exciting the attention, they call it off; common ſenſe proteſts againſt their art, and declares

ſuch fictions to be lies, and ſuch emblems to be mere puerilities.

From hence, I do not infer that the painter any more than the poet is confined to the rigour of hiſtorical veracity. He can introduce what perſonages he chooſes as actors, or create them at pleaſure, if he does not find them in his ſtory; or if he does not chooſe to reſtrain himſelf to hiſtory at all, he can take his fable from romance, or from his own invention: the death of Dido is as proper for the pencil, as the death of Lucretia. He is only obliged to follow nature in what he invents, and not make monſters inſtead of men; for

for ſuch I muſt call every allegorical perſon, when introduced into painting, which either ceaſes to be allegorical, or fails to touch me as a man.

The ſcenery is alſo entirely in his own power, which he can diſpoſe into lawns or groves, and decorate with the elegance of architecture, or with the awful horror of rocks and precipices. Only here too he muſt confine himſelf to thoſe bounds which reaſon and philoſophy have preſcribed: as it would be abſurd to paint his dolphins in the foreſt, or his boars in the waters, ſo is it unphiloſophical to extend his ſcenes beyond the juſt limits of perſpective,

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which depends on the certain principles of geometry: whenever he departs from this reſtriction, and attempts to repreſent his actions in the heavens, ſo far is he from ſtriking the mind with any thing awful and ſublime, that the ſituation of his gods upon the canvas, appears as ridiculous as harlequin deſcending upon the ſtage in his paſte-board clouds.

I hope no artiſt or connoiſſeur will be offended at the liberty I have taken to ſpeak my own ſentiments and my own feelings. I would be underſtood to blame only the *deſign* in theſe compoſitions: it appears to me that metaphor

phor and allegory are flowers of ſo tender and delicate a frame, that being native of the ſoil of poetry, they fade and die away the moment they are tranſplanted. The only inſtance I know of their being happily employed in painting, is in ſubjects of the burleſque kind. I am aware I may be told of abundance of pictures, of the firſt form, where they are introduced, and the narration will appear ſo plauſible, as to ſeem to contradict whatever I have urged; but my anſwer ſhould be, let the pictures be *ſeen*; in the relation it is poetry, not painting, and therefore the idea pleaſes. However, it is always to be remembered, that

thoſe

thoſe artiſts who have uſed them in the higher compoſitions, have the examples of many illuſtrious names, both ancient and modern, to juſtify their practice; and it muſt be confeſſed, it requires a very lively and inventive genius to be able to produce them, though I am of opinion it is the merit of the execution alone that has been able to ſupport them. But if I am totally miſtaken in what I have advanced, I freely own, it ariſes from hence, that I, being neither painter, nor ſculptor, nor poet, want that *vivida vis animi* which is neceſſary even to judge rightly of theſe flights of poetic enthuſiaſm.

It is high time, Sir, that I apologize to you for the length of this epiſtle: I flatter myſelf the importance of the ſubject it treats, to thoſe arts of which you are ſo great an admirer and ſo true a judge, will plead my excuſe. Your Excellency has given convincing proofs of your taſte in the polite arts, by being the firſt nobleman who introduced a juſt piece of architecture into Ruſſia. You, Sir, are ſenſible of how much conſequence it is to the ſucceſs of the ſciences and arts, that they who purſue them be not led into a wrong tract at their firſt ſetting out. If I have offered any uſeful hint, or given any light which may aſſiſt to diſcover the road,

road, I ſhall think myſelf really happy to contribute, though in the ſmalleſt degree, to the promoting a plan, which has engaged ſo large a ſhare of the attention of her Imperial Majeſty; under whoſe auſpices, I nothing doubt, but ſuch a foundation will be laid, in this empire, for the eſtabliſhment of commerce, and all thoſe arts which are the advantages and the ornaments of civil ſociety, as will illuminate the name of Catherine the ſecond with irradiant glory in the records of fame.

If this trifle, ſmall as it is, can be of any public utility, may it be conſidered as an acknowledgment, the only ac-

knowledgment I can make, for that hoſpitality, that perfect liberty and ſecurity which every ſtranger finds in Ruſſia; and which a ſubject of one of the freeſt governments in the world, openly declares, he could not have enjoyed, in a higher degree, in his own country, than he has during a reſidence of four years at St. Peterſburgh!

I have the honour to be, &c.

St. Peterſburg,
March 25, 1768.

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA